

News Release
U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
District of Rhode Island



January 22, 2004

Pawtucket woman is arrested on cocaine-trafficking charges

Federal agents and police detectives yesterday arrested **Maria Benavides**, of Central Falls, acting on a warrant issued in conjunction with a federal indictment charging Benavides with a cocaine-trafficking conspiracy.

The Office of the United States Attorney, Kenneth W. Kaiser, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Colonel Steven M. Pare, Superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police, jointly announced a two-count indictment, which was returned on January 15 but placed under seal until Benavides' arrest.

Benavides was arraigned yesterday before Magistrate Judge Robert W. Lovegreen in U.S. District Court, Providence. She pleaded not guilty and was ordered detained pending a hearing scheduled for tomorrow.

The indictment charges Benavides with conspiring to distribute in excess of five kilograms of cocaine and aiding and abetting others in possessing with intent to distribute in excess of five kilograms of cocaine on February 8 and 9, 2003. Benavides, 29, lives at 45 Claremont Street, Central Falls, as did **Shawn Montegio**, who was arrested on February 9, 2003 on similar cocaine trafficking charges and who pleaded guilty in August to those charges and to firearms offenses. Montegio is detained pending sentencing.

House forfeited

Benavides owned the house at 45 Claremont Street, but it was forfeited to the government after a civil trial in U.S. District Court in October. U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith found that the house had been used to facilitate drug trafficking.

An indictment is merely an allegation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Upon conviction, the statutory maximum penalty for each count of the indictment is life imprisonment and a \$4,000,000 fine, with a minimum sentence of ten years imprisonment. Exact sentencing for any defendant convicted would be determined on the basis of federal sentencing guidelines, which take into account such factors as the specific nature and impact of an offense and a defendant's criminal background, if any.

The **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force** investigated the case. The Task Force is led by the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** and the **Rhode Island State Police**. Detectives from the **Central Falls, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, and Woonsocket Police Departments** participated in the Task Force investigation. The **Rhode Island National Guard** provides administrative support to the HIDTA Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden is prosecuting the case.

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